

Message Text

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SUBJECT: PROTESTANT "THIRD FORCE" RAISES FEARS OF BRITISH WITH-DRAWAL

1. FOR PAST WEEK, ALL DUBLIN PAPERS HAVE BEEN VERY CONCERNED ABOUT PRESSURE FROM NI "LOYALISTS" TO CREATE AN ARMED "THIRD FORCE" FROM PROTESTANT COMMUNITY THAT COULD, IN EFFECT, BE A REINCARNATION OF THE SECTARIAN B-SPECIALS. (BELFAST CABLES ARE REPORTING DETAILS.) WE HAVE DISCUSSED ISSUE WITH TWO GOI CONT-ACTS AND GATHER THAT PRESS REPORTS DIRECTLY REFLECT OFFICIAL BACKGROUND BRIEFINGS. BASIC GOI LINE IS THAT CREATION OF ARMED, OFFICIAL PROTESTANT FORCE WOULD ALMOST CERTAINLY SCUTTLE ANY HOPE FOR NI POLITICAL SOLUTION. CATHOLICS WOULD INEVITABLY SET UP A COUNTERPART OF THEIR OWN NOW BEING CALLED A ("FOURTH FORCE"), AND BATTLE LINES WOULD BE DRAWN. PROTESTANTS BACKED BY A CLEARLY SECTARIAN FORCE WOULD HAVE EVEN LESS INCENT-IVE TO ACCEPT POLITICAL COMPROMISE AT FORTHCOMING CONSTITUTIONAL CONVENTION. ON CATHOLIC SIDE, PEACE-MINDED SDLP WOULD HAVE LOST THE INITIATIVE.

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2. DUBLIN ALSO EXPECTS THAT PROTESTANT "THIRD FORCE" WOULD BE CON-

TROLLED BY TRADITIONAL UNIONISTS (WEST, PAISLEY, CRAIG) RATHER THAN BY EMERGING WORKING-CLASS PROTESTANT LEADERS. THIS WOULD BE ANOTHER BLOW TO CONSTITUTIONAL CONVENTION, SINCE A SPLIT IN PROTESTANT RANKS IS PROBABLY NECESSARY FOR CONSTITUTIONAL COM-PROMISE. (SEE LONDON 10294 AND DUBLIN 1068.)

3. BRITISH LABOUR GOVT IN GENERAL, AND MERLYN REES IN PARTICULAR, ARE DRAWING STRONG CRITICISM FOR ALLOWING PLANS FOR "THIRD FORCE" TO GO SO FAR. CATHOLIC COMMUNITY IN GENERAL BELIEVES THAT, IF REES BACKS AWAY FROM CONFORNTATION WITH LOYALISTS OVER THIS FUNDAMENTAL ISSUE, WRITING IS CLEARLY ON THE WALL THAT BRITISH ARE PLANNING TO WITHDRAW FROM NI, EVEN IF THEY CANNOT ACHIEVE POLITICAL SOLUTION.

4. THERE MAY BE FACE-SAVING WAYS OUT OF THIS PROBLEM: AN UNARMED POLICE AUXILIARY UNDER RUC, FOR EXAMPLE, WOULD NOT BE COMPARABLE TO B-SPECIALS. BUT NO ONE HERE EXPECTS THAT PROTEST-ANTS WILL EASILY SETTLE FOR A "THIRD FORCE" WITHOUT TEETH.

5. COMMENT: DUBLIN CONTACTS MAY BE MORE WORRIED THAN NECESSARY ABOUT REES, WHO MUST SURELY SEE THAT IT WOULD BE DISASTROUS TO ALLOW RETURN OF B-SPECIALS. AN ELEMENT OF REAL CONCERN IS UNDERS-TANDABLE, HOWEVER, SINCE DUBLIN HAS NO CONFIDENCE IN ITS ABILITY TO DEAL WITHPOTENTIAL CIVIL-WAR SITUATION IN NORTH. WE ASSUME THAT BRITISH WILL MEET THIS CHALLENGE, BUT WE AGREE THAT THEY WOULD LOSE MOST OF THEIR CREDIBILITY IF THEY SHOULD FAIL. MOORE

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